

### Principles and Proposals of the "Committee of Physicians"

*The Board of Trustees [of the American Medical Association] has especially authorized the publication of the following statement:*

Following the publication of the report of the American Foundation Studies in Government, a small group of physicians, assembled in New York, developed certain principles and proposals which have since been circulated by a self-appointed Committee of Physicians among the medical profession of the United States, with a view to obtaining signatures in their support. During a period of approximately six months, some 430 medical men have apparently permitted the use of their names. Early in November the self-appointed group of physicians released to the press for Sunday, November 7, a statement of principles and proposals to which the names of the 430 signers were affixed. The newspapers generally heralded this action as a revolt against the American Medical Association, in a great majority of the cases indicating that there was a revolt in behalf of "state medicine." The publication of this manifesto and the attached signatures has been heralded with glee by many of those who have been opposing the American Medical Association in behalf of cooperative practice, sickness insurance, and various fundamental changes in the nature of the practice of medicine. Within the last week another series of proposals has come from another self-appointed group requesting signatures of physicians. This series of proposals includes the suggestion for enabling legislation for sickness insurance.<sup>†</sup>

The American Medical Association is an organization of physicians along strictly democratic lines. Representatives of county medical societies send delegates to state medical societies and these, in turn, send their delegates to the House of Delegates of the American Medical Association. It is possible for any physician, through his delegate, to obtain consideration of any proposal which he may wish to bring to the attention of the House of Delegates. At the Atlantic City session the delegates from New York State presented these principles and proposals, slightly modified, as an action of the House of Delegates of the New York State Medical Society. They were carried before a reference committee and, in several sessions of that reference committee, considerable numbers of physicians presented arguments for and against their adoption. The House of Delegates, however, after thorough consideration of the report of the reference committee, and with full cognizance of the method of development of these principles and proposals, and of the considerations which were involved in their passage by the House of Delegates of the New York State Medical Society, did not accept them. The House of Delegates did, however, point out the willingness of the medical profession to do its utmost today, as in the past, to provide adequate medical service for all those unable to pay either in whole or in part.

Why, then, any necessity for the circulation of petitions presenting proposals for fundamental changes in the nature of development, distribution, and payment for medical service? Is there a well-designed plan to impress the executive and legislative branches of our government with the view that the American medical profession is disorganized, distrustful of its leaders, undemocratic in its action and opposed to the best interests of the people? Who may profit from such evidence of disorganization? Is there any evidence that the self-appointed Committee of Physicians and the 430 physicians who have affixed their names to these principles and proposals are any better able to represent the opinion of the American medical profession than the democratically chosen House of Delegates of the American Medical Association—one of the most truly representative bodies existing in any type of organized activity in this country today?

The House of Delegates has given its mandate to the Board of Trustees, to the officers and to the employees of the Association. That mandate opposes the principles and proposals emanating from the Committee of Physicians, and equally the new proposals. If the House of Delegates sees fit to depart from the principles now established, it will be the duty of the Board of Trustees, the officers and the employees of the American Medical Association to promote such new principles as the House of Delegates may

establish. Until, however, the regularly chosen representatives of the 106,000 physicians who constitute the membership of the American Medical Association (now the largest membership in its history) determine, after due consideration, that some fundamental change or revolution in the nature of development, distribution and payment for medical service in the United States is necessary, physicians will do well to abide by the principles which the House of Delegates has established. They will at the same time deprecate any attempts inclined to lead the executive and legislative branches of our government, as well as the people of the United States, into the belief that the American medical profession is disorganized.

Members of the medical profession, locally and in the various states, are ready and willing to consider, with other agencies, ways and means of meeting the problems of providing medical service and diagnostic laboratory facilities for all requiring such services and not able to meet the full cost thereof. The American Medical Association has reaffirmed its willingness on receipt of direct request to cooperate with any governmental or other qualified agency and to make available the information, observations and results of investigation, together with any facilities of the Association. Thus far, no call has come from any governmental or other qualified agency, for the cooperation of the American Medical Association in studying the need of all or of any groups of the people for medical service, to determine to what extent any considerable proportion of our public are actually suffering from lack of medical care. The offer still stands as evidence of the willingness of the American Medical Association to aid in finding a solution to any or all of the problems in the field of medical care that now prevail.

**Other State Association and Component County Society News.**—Additional news concerning the activities and work of the California Medical Association and its component county medical societies is printed in this issue, commencing on page 415.

## EDITORIAL COMMENT<sup>†</sup>

### CIVILIZATIONS AND THEIR DISEASES, AND REBUILDING A WRECKED WORLD CIVILIZATION\*

Astonishing, if not amazing, as the work of a nonagenarian, this substantial volume, designed to set one a-thinking, from the brain of Dr. Joseph Pomeroy Widney, founder of the Los Angeles Medical Association, now in his ninety-sixth year, is the latest addition to an already ample literary output, the worth while fruit of an intellect still virile and ever active; reaching out, despite the handicap of loss of sight, along the tracks of history to remote corners of the world, and even peering afar, as it were, into the vast, unknown universe. He dedicates the book "To the Unresting Dead of a Mighty Past," in verses, the opening stanza reading:

Night—and an upland plain,  
Lone mountain looking down,  
A broken colonnade,  
And an esplanade once trod  
By long-forgotten feet,  
Ages and ages ago.

<sup>†</sup> This department of CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE presents editorial comments by contributing members on items of medical progress, science and practice, and on topics from recent medical books or journals. An invitation is extended to all members of the California Medical Association to submit brief editorial discussions suitable for publication in this department. No presentation should be over five hundred words in length.

\* By Joseph Widney. Cloth. Pp. 176, with two illustrations: Frontispiece of the author and "Presentation of Bust of Dr. J. P. Widney to Library of Los Angeles Medical Association." Los Angeles: Pacific Publishing Company, 1937.

<sup>†</sup> The reference here made is to a letter sent out by California physicians, and printed in this issue, on page 430.

The author forms a Preface of his address to the Medical Association on the occasion of the Widney bust unveiling on May 11, 1937, as duly reported in *CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE*, and offers the already attracted reader both "A Personal Word," as an item or two of autobiography, and "A Retrospect," recounting how, when surgeon in the United States Army, 1867-1869, doing field duty in Indian-infested Arizona, he first began, in the deathless quiet of the desert, his saddle for a pillow and constantly exposed to peril, to find answers to questions he had been asking himself since boyhood. There he learned how primitive men lived, and there he found the key that unlocked the years so long gone. "From the man of the desert, from the lines of the emigrant wagons and their needs, I read the laws of ages ago." Discussing the discovery of fire, as part of the family history of civilization, this early California pioneer says: "The use of flint and steel was still common among the Spanish of the old Mission days after I came among them in 1868. Matches were a luxury, and were not wasted." And he then tells what he knew of evidences of the Cliff Dwellers in Arizona and New Mexico, and their clever use of fire.

Coming to discuss "civilizations which seem to be dying," the author pays especial attention to the Italy of the twentieth century, with a pointed remark about the so-called Dictator of the Mediterranean. "It is this land," he says, "in which, after fifteen centuries, Mussolini is trying to rebuild the old Roman Empire. But he has to work with a people from whom the old Latin blood is largely gone. The Italy of today belongs among the decadent bloods of earth's dying and dead. Can Mussolini succeed? Time will show; but the odds are against him." The writer also turns his spotlight on "The Latin Sisters: Italy and Spain," asking if the Italy of Virgil, Livy, and Marcus Aurelius, and the law of military supremacy can live again? "Italy is united in name, but is starving, and Mussolini's efforts in Tunisia are a struggle for food." So he believes that "the causes of Spain's decline and death were of her own making, and in her madness she is destroying herself."

Part II, or the second half of Doctor Widney's book of very suggestive essays, is devoted to reflections on "The Rebuilding of a Wrecked Civilization," a chapter of particular interest being that which portrays "The Strong Man," and pictures his coming again. Mussolini, trained in war, is trying to rehabilitate Italy, and there is Hitler, with the "Greater Dual Alliance," while Stalin is welding Russia together. There may be a healing of the nations, but there are serious problems which the world still has to face. The sick world, indeed, needs diagnosis, and a prompt one at that, and then a speedy follow-up, to reach all the sources of infection.

P. W.

### PRURITUS: A SUGGESTION

The subject of pruritus, especially perianal, always has been an unhappy one, because the medical profession has been able to do so little for it except when a very specific cause could be found, such as the types definitely caused by fungus. Everything in the book has been recommended as a cure. Once in a while we find x-ray treatment of value, but more often not.

Because we noted, some years ago, that the patients who were urged to wash the parts thoroughly with soap and water after a bowel movement were improved or cured, a superficial irritation of the skin was thought to be the cause; and for this reason, having had such success in the treatment of burns and ulcers on other parts of the skin with the use of 1 per cent watery solution of gentian violet painted on and thoroughly dried, we tried it in the treatment of pruritus.

The parts are thoroughly cleaned and dried, the gentian solution is then painted on and thoroughly dried at the time with our connection with compressed air. Fanning probably would do as well. This should be used every day for a while, then three times a week if necessary. It will be found that there is a decided improvement, if the method is properly used as above described.

We offer this for trial by the profession because we have had such a signal success in a few cases.

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ALANSON WEEKS,  
G. D. DELPRAT,  
San Francisco.

### HEAT-REGULATING EFFICIENCY AND IMMUNITY

This current tendency to ignore specific serum components, and to study microbial infections from a broad physiologic point of view, is well illustrated in recent studies by Dr. Arthur Locke<sup>1</sup> of the Western Pennsylvania Hospital, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania bacteriologist studied the relation between the heat-producing and heat-regulating mechanisms of rabbits, and their resistance to experimental pneumococcus infections. To determine heat-regulating and heat-producing efficiency, Doctor Locke chilled his stock rabbits by partial immersion in cold water until the rectal temperature had been reduced to approximately 95° F. The rabbits were then dried to fluffiness with absorbent cloths. The rate of rectal temperature recovery was then determined. In his most efficient rabbits, a 3° restoration of rectal temperature was accomplished within twenty minutes. These animals were assigned an arbitrary "fitness rating" of one (100 per cent). Rabbits requiring forty minutes for a similar restoration of temperature were given rating of 0.5; those requiring as long as 125 minutes, a rating of 0.16 (20/125). Doctor Locke found that fitness rating thus calculated is fairly constant under routine laboratory conditions, maximum discrepancies on retests being in the neighborhood of 10 per cent.

For his first immunologic tests, Doctor Locke selected twelve Class A rabbits (*i. e.*, animals

<sup>1</sup> Locke, Arthur, *J. Infect. Dis.*, 60: 106 (Jan.-Feb.), 1937.